**The Life of Confucius**

Confucius, or K’ung Fu-tzu, was born in China on Sept. 27 or 28, 551 B.C., in the state of Lu, now Shantung Province. The Chinese observe his birthday, called Teachers’ Day, on Sept. 28. His father was said to have been a member of the nobility, but the K’ung family fell to poverty after his death, when Confucius was just three. In spite of his family’s financial problems, Confucius received a good education in music, arithmetic, calligraphy, and other disciplines. After marrying at age 19, he earned a living tending stable animals and keeping accounts for granaries. Then he became a philosopher and teacher. Meanwhile, his wife gave birth to a son and two daughters. In his early fifties, he accepted prestigious government employment in his region, overseeing public works and efforts to combat crime. However, the powers-that-be later drove him from office, probably because he incurred their displeasure. In his later years, he spent his time interpreting classic Chinese literature. He died in 479 B.C. in his home province and was buried in the town of Qufu (also transliterated as *Chü-fou* and *Kufow*), the capital of the state of Lu in ancient times. A temple honoring Confucius and his disciples was built in 1724 on the site where his house once stood. Just outside the town is the tomb of Confucius and other members of the K’ung family.

**Confucius: *Analects* (5th C. BCE?)**

*The sayings of Confucius were remembered by his followers and were later compiled in a book of Analects (sayings), perhaps having been expanded on in the meantime. Through them we discover Confucius' notions of the virtues, i.e., the positive character traits, to which we should aspire. Foremost among these is Filial Piety, the respect which children owe to parents--and by extension, wives owe to husbands, sisters to brothers, and everyone to ancestors. When such virtue is cultivated in the home, it is supposed to carry over into one's relations in affairs of state as well.*

**On Filial Piety**

Mang I asked what filial piety is. The Master said, "It is being obedient." Soon after, as Fan Chi was driving him, the Master told him "Mang asked me what filial piety is, and I answer him 'being obedient.'" Fan Chi asked, "What exactly did you mean?" The Master replied, "That parents, when alive, should be served according to ritual; that, when dead, they should be buried according to ritual; and that they should be sacrificed to according to ritual."

Ziyou asked what filial piety is. The Master said, "The filial piety of now-a-days means providing nourishment for one's parents. But dogs and horses likewise are able to do something along that line for their own kind. Without reverence, what is there to distinguish the one support given from the other?"

**On Goodness**

The Master said, "A youth, when at home, should behave well toward his parents, and when abroad, respectfully to his elders. He should be earnest and truthful. He should overflow in love to all, and cultivate the friendship of the good. When he has time and opportunity, after doing those things, he should study the polite arts."

The Master said, "With coarse rice to eat, with water to drink, and my bended arm for a pillow, I still have joy in the midst of these things. Riches and honours acquired by unrighteousness are to me as a floating cloud."

Zhonggong asked about perfect virtue. The Master said, "When abroad, behave to everyone as if you were receiving an important guest; treat people as if you were assisting at a great sacrifice; do not do to others as you would not wish done to yourself. Thereby you will let no murmuring rise against you in the country, and none in the family. . . ."

**On the Gentleman**

*Confucius took the notion of the gentleman, as one who owned land and had some political power, and reworked it into a moral notion which captures the essence of the good life. The graciousness and self-discipline which characterize such a gentleman are fostered by, and expressed in, ritual and music. But this also leads to many detailed guidelines about how to dress and how to perform the rituals. (The counterpart would be rules of etiquette in our society.)*

The Master said, "Riches and honours are what men desire; but if they cannot be obtained in the proper way, they should be let go. Poverty and meanness are what men dislike; but if they cannot be avoided in the proper way, they should not be avoided. If a gentleman abandons virtue, how can he fulfill the requirements of his title? A gentleman not, even for the space of a single meal, act contrary to virtue. Even in moments of haste, and in times of danger, he clings to virtue."

The Master said, "A gentleman, well studied in literature, and abiding by the rules of ritual, will not go very wrong."

"When gentlemen perform well all their duties to their relations, the people are inspired to virtue. When they remain true to their old friends, the people are preserved from irresponsible behavior."

The Master said, "A gentleman points out the admirable qualities of men and does not point out their bad qualities. A petty man does just the opposite."

The Master said, "A gentleman is distressed by his lack of ability, but he is not distressed by men's not knowing him."

The Master said, "What the gentleman demands is something of himself. What the petty man demands is something of others."

**On Ritual and Music**

The Master said, "If a man lacks the human virtues, what has he to do with ritual? If a man lacks the human virtues, what has he to do with music?"

The Master said, "Respectfulness, without the rules of ritual becomes laborious bustle; carefulness, without the rules, becomes timidity; boldness becomes insubordination; straightforwardness becomes rudeness.

The Master said, "It is by the Odes that a man's mind is aroused, by the rules of ritual that his character is established, and by music that he is perfected [finished]. . . ."

*Education is, of course, important to Confucius, as one needs to learn the traditions and profit from the wisdom of the past. Government can then be carried on by "moral force," as opposed to requiring military or legal force. As to religion, Confucius does not challenge it, but he doesn't put his hope in it either. His stress is always on living well, which means living properly, here and now and by our own actions.*

Which is more important for an orderly state: food, weapons, or a government that one can trust.

**On Education**

The Master said, "Anyone learning without thought is lost; anyone thinking but not learning is in peril."

The Master said, "Yu, shall I teach you what knowledge is? When you know a thing, to realize that you know it; and when you do not know a thing, to allow that you do not know it: this is knowledge." The Master said, [I have been] "a transmitter and not a maker, believing in and loving the ancients. . ."

When the Master went to Wei, Ran Yu acted as driver of his carriage. The Master observed, "How numerous the people are!" Ran Yu asked, "When they are more numerous, what more shall be done for them ?" "Enrich them," was the reply. "And when they have been enriched, what more shall be done?" The Master said, "Instruct them."

**On Government**

The Master said, "To rule a country of a thousand chariots requires reverent attention to business, sincerity, economy in expenditures, and love for men, as well as the employment of the people only in the right seasons."

The Master said, "If the people are governed by laws and punishment is used to maintain order, they will try to avoid the punishment but have no sense of shame. If they are governed by virtue and rules of propriety [ritual] are used to maintain order, they will have a sense of shame and will become good as well."

Ji Kang Zi asked Confucius about government, saying, "What do you say to killing those who are unprincipled [i.e., the immoral] for the good of those who are principled?" Confucius replied, "Sir, in carrying on your government, why should you use killing at all? Let your obvious desires be for what is good, and the people will be good. The relation between superiors and inferiors is like that between the wind and the grass: the grass is bound to bend when the wind blows across it."

Zigong asked about government. The Master said, "The requisites of government are that there be sufficient food, sufficient military equipment, and the confidence of the people in their ruler." Zigong said, "If one had to dispense with one of those three, which should be given up first?" "The military equipment, " said the Master. Zigong again asked, "If on had to dispense with one of the two remaining, which should be given up?" The Master answered, "Give up the food. From of old, death has always been the lot of men; but if the people have no faith in their rulers, they cannot stand."